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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Gkartzonika, E. (2011). Post-cold war trajectories of memory and oblivion in Bulgaria and Kosovo. *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, 11(4), 725-736. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-445834>

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Post-Cold War Trajectories of Memory and Oblivion in Bulgaria and Kosovo¹

ELENA GKARTZONIKA

A fertile ground of research on social relations is offered upon examining the conditions under which, groups of power engaged in a dispute for political /economic control choose to impose social oppression, thus disorienting people in misleading ventures for democratic consolidation. Our comparative analysis, as a method of research, perceives the past in two dimensions: as a cluster of older realities and as the content of the current collective memory – a political issue at stake. As for the past realities, we attempt a critical content analysis of the available evidence. Concerning their present representation, our analysis investigates the mechanism of selecting and reconstructing the past or how social (ab)uses of the past are formulated as collective memory, in a process closely correlated with present socio-economic transformations². Thus, collective memory is not an eventual issue of remembrances, but rather the result of prevailing forces' image and their interrelations within a social formation. Besides tracing elements of "cultural hegemony"³, the analysis will also look at the effects of the "ideological state apparatus on the reproduction of the production conditions"⁴,

¹ For images and documents of the two case-studies, please consult the online appendix: <http://11-balkandecks.blogspot.com/2011/10/oblivious-memories.html>. Another version of this paper, focusing on (neo)populist aspects of both cases, was presented at the 7th Conference in Social Sciences – "What Follows after the Crisis? Approaches to Global Transformations" (CEU Budapest, May 27th -29th, 2011).

² See: Maurice HALBWACHS, *On Collective Memory*, Chicago University Press, 1992; Matthias FRITSCH, *The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin and Derrida*, New York Univ., New York, 2006; Jeffrey OLICK, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*, Routledge, New York, London, 2007; Ernst H. GOMBRICH, *The Uses of Images: Studies in the Social Function of Art and Visual Communication*, Phaidon, London, 1999; Andreas HUYSEN, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford University Press, California, 2003; Paul CONNERTON, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989; Tzvetan TODOROV, *Les Abus de la mémoire*, Arlea, Paris, 1995; John GILLIS, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, Princeton University, Princeton, 1994; Frances PINE et al.(eds.), *Memory, Politics and Religion: the Past Meets the Present in Europe*, Lit, Munster, 2004; Katharine HODGKIN, Susannah RADSTONE, *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, Routledge, New York-London, 2003; Matt MATSUDA, *The Memory of the Modern*, Oxford Univ. Press, New York, 1996; David SUMMERS, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*, Phaidon, London, 2003; Jan W. MULLER, *Memory and Power in Postwar Europe – Studies in the Presence of the Past*, Cambridge University, Cambridge, 2002; Christian COQ, Jean-Pierre BACOT, *Travail de mémoire, 1914-1998: une nécessité dans un siècle de violence*, Éd. Autrement, Paris, 1999; Conny MITHANDER et al. (eds), *Collective Traumas: Memories of War and Conflict in 20th century Europe*, P.I.E.P. Lang, Bruxelles, 2007.

³ As defined by Antonio GRAMSCI, *Prison Notebooks*, 3 vols, Columbia University, New York, 1992, 1996, 2010.

⁴ Louis ALTHUSSER, "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État (Notes pour une recherche)", *La Pensée*, no. 151, 1970, pp. 3-38.

and "the temporal matrix within which, national territorial identity and socio-cultural tradition are crystallized"¹, while analyzing the cases of Buzludža and Gazimestan. As *lieux de mémoire*² they both lay "concrete" foundations for a time-spatial approach towards the state's practices³ and their realization, turning our paradigms into a safe indicator for the above-mentioned "*cadres*"⁴.

Such a manifold approach to memory materialization⁵ could not find a more efficient application than in post-Cold War Balkans. Bulgaria and Ex-Yugoslavia are similar cases in the sense that both versions of collective memory were originally constructed in the Warsaw-Pact frame, but different in the sense that Buzludža was constructed in a socialist country, a former national state, while Gazimestan Tower was erected within a socialist federation transformed, after the dissolution of the bipolar world, into a country. The political and ideological (dis)similarities also suggest the need to take into account a socialist and post-socialist periodization.

TWO PARADIGMS OF A CRITICAL CONJECTURE

Ten years after the last wars in South-Eastern Europe, a collection of transitional or hybrid regimes are still oscillating in a grey zone between the democratic and authoritarian poles, halting or delaying their transformation. Corruption is rising, division lines between East and West are perpetuated, and solidarity is in decline. The post-1989 European democracy could have had the crucial effect it had promised for the region. However, rather than stopping it, the pace of separatist processes accelerated with a series of declarations, setting overwhelming majorities as a criterion for legalizing political entities. Illusions reproduced old forms of domination⁶ in times of unrest and international restructure of the *haut-finance*⁷. Accordingly, Balkan socio-ideological life failed to abolish the impact of penetration that distorted the political and economic contradictions⁸. People of the region seem ready to endure dysfunctional states and badly-governed democracies, defusing their ire or need for change by claiming "brave" ancestors. "Victories", at least symbolic, seem total.

¹ Nicos POULANTZAS, *L'État, le Pouvoir, le Socialisme*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1978.

² Pierre NORA, *Les Lieux de mémoire 2. La Nation*, Gallimard, Paris, 1986.

³ Henri LEFEBVRE, *Espace et politique (Le droit à la ville II)*, Anthropos, Paris, 1973; IDEM, *La production de l'espace*, Anthropos, Paris, 1974.

⁴ Maurice HALBWACHS, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1925.

⁵ Maynard SOLOMON, *Marxism and Art: Essays Classic and Contemporary*, Knopf, New York, 1973.

⁶ C. Wright MILLS, *The Power Elite*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1956.

⁷ Karl POLANYI, *The Great Transformation*, Rinehart, New York, 1944.

⁸ L.S. STAVRIANOS, "The Influence of the West in the Balkans", in Charles and Barbara JELAVICH (eds), *Balkans in Transition*, California University Press, Berkeley, 1963, pp. 184-226.

*"Forget Your Past":**Buzludža, Ownerless Communist National Memories*

Buzludža is one of the historical peaks in Bulgaria's Central Stara Planina. As part of today's "Šipka-Buzludža" national park museum, it is reached by a 12 kilometers side-road from Šipka Pass. Near this passage point, on Stoletov peak, stands Šipka Memorial, designed by the architect A. Donkov and the sculptor Al. Andreev and inaugurated in 1934, to commemorate those dead for the liberation of Bulgaria during the Russian-Turkish War (1877-1878). It is a monument of great importance for the national appeal, enhancing Bulgaria's bonds with Tsarist Russia/Soviet Union.

On the opposite peak, Buzludža, another monument was inaugurated on August 28, 1981 by the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), T. Živkov. It was erected to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Buzludža Congress of 1891. On that year, social-democrats led by D. Blagoev (1856-1924) assembled secretly and founded the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Workers Party¹. Thus, the Buzludža monument was erected by the ruling BCP in remembrance of that meeting, institutionalizing its socio-political struggle and transforming the place into a reminder of its own prehistory. The monument also symbolized Bulgaria's "rebellious" past, being built where the final battle between the Ottomans and the Bulgarian band led by Hadži Dimităr took place and where he fell (1868) becoming an inspiring national martyr and symbol².

The very date of the inauguration generously provided the Bulgarian socialist present with a third moment of the national history. In 1981, the 1300th anniversary of the foundation of the Bulgarian State in 681 by Asparuh was also celebrated. A grandiose plan enhancing both a remembrance of the medieval state and a laudation of the present socialist one was accompanied by a plethora of activities ranging from history to politics or military institutions (coinage, medals), the publication of collective volumes or proceedings of congresses etc. Architectural projects were also carried out massively: restoration of monuments (such as the finishing up of the fortress of Veliko Târnovo, Tsarevets, founded in 1930), the foundation of commemorating multi-leveled buildings, the erection of huge monuments in the capital as well as in the provinces (such as the "1300-years monument: Past, Present and Future", the most controversial monument in Sofia³ and "Bulgaria 1300 years: Founders of Bulgarian State" Monument in Šumen). Economic events were likewise linked with similar past ones. The 100 years history of the national coin, the *lev* (lion, the traditional Bulgarian symbol), was

¹ Blagoev linked the struggle for the Bulgarian working-class interests and the love for homeland with proletarian internationalism. In his work *What Is Socialism and Can It Take Root Here?* (Sofia, 1891), he expounded scientific socialism's basic propositions. His book *From the History of Socialism in Bulgaria* (1906), initiating Bulgarian Marxist historiography, was highly regarded for Working-class Party's ideological fortification and its struggle, against opportunism, theoretical substantiation.

² Hristo Botev (1848-1876), Bulgaria's "revered" national poet and revolutionary, titled after him his most famous and still influential poem on the uprising, first published in the illegal newspaper *Nezavisimost* (Independence) in 1873.

³ It was completed in 8 months with low quality controls, resulting in collapse after 4 years. During the 1990's it was completely abandoned by the state. In 2002, due to a visit by Pope John Paul II in Sofia, it was enclosed by a fence, a fact that made known the debate that concerned its future.

recalled¹ along with its value – equal to that of the French franc – and the inscription on it, “Bulgarians’ Union Creates Power” in Bulgarian, conveying nationalist civic/ethno-populist aspirations for homogenization². In 1981 the Bulgarian *lev*, pegged to the US dollar since 1962, was represented as going through its second decade of stability (albeit its convertibility to Western funds was not free, since black market rates were five to ten times higher than the official ones).

All the celebrations were carried out under the auspices of the “1300 Years of Bulgaria Foundation” committee. This was a quasi-independent entity to support the Arts established by Živkov’s daughter, Ljudmila Živkova (1942-1981), Politburo member of the BCP Central Committee and Chairwoman of the Committee for Culture³. As a powerful intellectual leader of the Bulgarian Arts, she laid great emphasis on the indigenous Bulgarian culture. It was an idea formulated during the 1970s and it marked the 1300th anniversary of the foundation of the Bulgarian state in the Balkan Peninsula, celebrated in the year of her much-discussed death. Her preference for “moulded personalities” and the idea of “beauty in public life”⁴ were not to be fully developed, nor were they applied for long. Soon after her death, her father removed her idealistic book on “beauty’s laws” from circulation, along with most of her protégés from their influential state-posts. Actually, some of them were accused of misappropriating public funds intended for the Arts, with their Foundation – literal and metaphoric – involved in serious corruption.

The prevailing patrimonial dimension already described, relevant to the financial as well as the aesthetic aspect, finds its ultimate expression in the Buzludža monument. 16 000 000 *leva* were collected as both voluntary and obligatory donations for the construction of the House of the Bulgarian Communist Party, the largest monument in Bulgaria. Eventually, 14 186 000 *leva* were used, while the rest were spent for the construction of three kindergartens. It took military construction units almost seven years to complete it, together with more than 6.000 workers and experts. Under the guidance of the Bulgarian honorary member of World Architecture Community, G. Stoilov, more than twenty leading Bulgarian artists worked on the interior decoration for eighteen months. Verses from “The International” and “The Worker’s March” were inscribed on its façade. The interior used to be partly covered in marble, while the staircases were decorated with red stained glass. The foyer was fringed with blown out windows, providing unobstructed views of the surrounding countryside. In the fifteen meters high main hall of the memorial, a 500 square meters marquetry-fresco portrayed Marx, Engels, Lenin, and, on the opposite wall Živkov, next to D. Blagoev

¹ According to the Bulgarian National Bank the commemorative coinage reached the total of 5 492 000 coins of copper/nickel (1, 2 and 5 leva) and silver (25, 50 and 1000 leva).

² See Hans KOHN, *The Idea of Nationalism*, Macmillan, New York, 1967 [1944].

³ She created Sofia’s National Gallery of World Art, with a large collection of foreign paintings and statues acquired on world markets while ensuring the rapid construction of National Palace of Culture, the largest multifunctional centre in South-Eastern Europe (construction’s steel surpassed Eiffel Tower in 3000 tons) and “2005 world’s best”, according to the International Organization of Congress Centers. She also produced the Banner of Peace-International Children’s Assembly in Sofia under the auspices of Unesco. On her life see: Богомил РАЙНОВ, “Людмила: мечти и дела” (“Ljudmila: Dreams and Deeds”), *Продуцентска къща* (*Producentaska kashita*), vol. 2, no. 1/2, 2003.

⁴ L. ZHIVKOVA, *According to the Laws of Beauty*, Gruner, Amsterdam, 1981 [1979].

and G. Dimitrov (1882-1949, Bulgaria's first communist leader)¹, between depictions of women, men and children in a variety of communist themes. The dome was layered with thirty tons of copper. Two stars of "ruby" glass (*rubino oro*), twelve meters high, were built-in on top of a seventy meters high pylon, symbolizing a waving communist flag. These Buzludža stars – three times bigger than the Kremlin stars and the biggest in the world – were manufactured in the Soviet Union, an emblematic symbol of Bulgaria's bonds with it. Upon inauguration, Živkov embedded a bottle inside the walls holding a message for future generations on the historical significance of Buzludža. In his opening speech he emphatically noted: "Let us never desert the trails that lead here, of this legendary mountain, Buzludža"².

For a more thorough understanding of the ideological construction of the Buzludža-memorial, the only available information is offered by an interview given by its "national" architect, published in the year of celebration³. According to his idealistic description –reminding Živkova's discourse – the monument was perceived as a place for education in the spirit of socialist ideals. It was intended to reflect the deep roots of the people's culture and the peak of their present achievements, revealing their beauty and the bright future that is reserved through them. Simultaneously, it expressed great emotions associated with Buzludža peak. Apart from echoing the heroic battles of Hadzi Dimităr, it was associated with more important political and military events of Bulgaria's recent past, namely its union ("*sâjedinenieto*") with Eastern Rumelia (1885) and the early-1940s heroic partisan battles against the monarch-fascist forces. Buzludža, forged by Stoilov with such symbolic messages, acquired a "poetic" image sculpted out to become a *sacred* place, reminding a variety of national events. For Stoilov, an important element in determining its volume and final form was the proximity of previously constructed *sanctuaries*, with Šipka-peak's monument of liberation crowning the area. He also achieved a more favorable perception of its silhouette from other distant places in sight, such as the field of Kazanlâk or the highway Sofia-Burgas etc. The Buzludža monument, built so as to offer an impressive volume from a distance, was expected to enrich the approaching visitor's experience, not only in a three-dimensional perspective but also in its fourth dimension: time. Stoilov's solution resided in the idea of unity in both concept and function. Its main functional portion was transformed into "plastic volume, with a dynamic composition of a vertical and a spherical body being introduced in the environment of the park's territory". Moreover, the "purity of materials", of durable nature (concrete on the outside and marble in the interior), was represented as completing the architectural unity in composition and style, together with other elements of the synthesis (f.i. the enamel marquetry in natural stone colors). The dome going far beyond the round wall, closes the amphitheater without touching it. In Stoilov's own words, his intention was to create "an architectural metaphor", a new dome under which a sense

¹ He negotiated with Josip Broz Tito the creation of a Balkan Federative Republic, separated from the rest of the Slavic world, an obstacle to Stalin's aspirations for total control over the *Eastern Bloc*. The idea resulted in the 1947 Bled accord. Its policies were reversed after the Tito-Stalin split in June 1948, when Bulgaria, subordinated to the interests of the Soviet Union, turned against Yugoslavia.

² Georgi STOILOV, "Dom-pametnik Buzludža. Intervju s narodnija arhitekt Georgi Stoilov" ("House-monument Buzludža, Interview with the national architect Georgi Stoilov"), *Muzei i Pametnici na Kulturnata*, vol. 21, no. 6, Komitet za kultura, Sofia, 1981, p. 8.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 5-8.

of infinity is achieved through a series of concentric circles "expanding from a single center to infinity". Light, a strong factor for emotional impact, played an important role in creating the atmosphere and it was used carefully "from the outside with plenty of light entering the facilities in a damping range and, afterwards, reaching the solemn hall to complete an emotional load". The same approach was perceived on the inauguration night of the monument, "with careful modeling of forms, using white and golden light", while the bright light of the "ruby" star complemented the whole setting.

From the aforementioned artistic hyper-maximalism one has to reach the absolute minimalism, both equally charged with political symbolism, at the moment of the populist shift in the post-Cold War trajectories of the communist legacy. On November 10, 1989 Živkov stepped down, after thirty five years in power. Immediately, the Politburo ordered the removal of his portrait from the Buzludža memorial. The latter, being property of the ex-Communist Party, was ceded to the state in 1991, only to be abandoned and, consequently, open to looting. Today, it is mostly known as "the UFO", a surrealistic, derogatory term used even by Bulgarian tourist-guides. Besides the damage caused by weather conditions and the state's inertia for its protection, acts of destruction are visible on its façade. The red graffiti above its entrance, "*Forget Your Past*", written in English and with a certain attention for the lettering, conveys more than the monument's lamentable fate: once a symbol of national pride, today it is neglected and ransacked. Unlike the Thracian tombs representing a "golden" past, either the opposite Šipka-Pass that commemorate glorious wars for the national independence or the Rose Valley, an example of Bulgaria's "blossoming" economy, it is sinking in disdain along with the Cold war socialist regime. Its case is not unique. Not surprisingly more than one hundred monuments constructed between 1945 and 1989 were equally condemned to oblivion, either by abandonment, destruction (like G. Dimitrov's mausoleum in Sofia), transformation, or sale¹.

The House of the Bulgarian Communist Party in Buzludža, as a memory/oblivion paradigm in times of political upheavals, illustrates the social impact of the incessantly selective usage of the past by the political powers. A piece of art allegedly presented as a socialist avant-garde monument, carried rather the dominant totalitarian aesthetic, seeking to create an image of a classless society, not a vanguard against it. Moreover, it imposed for political reasons a historical abuse which after the state-capitalist shift of the 1990s was to be proven totally useless. Purposefully standing neglected and ravaged as a socialist wreck, it is not heralding optimistic social messages. As Bl. Vălkov, professor of the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Sofia has aptly stated:

"In defining the fate of monuments, their significance for shaping the public environment is also of particular importance. The landscape is complex and rich in terms of memories and forms, as well as with relation to power. Pulling down monuments creates fragmentation and indifference, as well as insecurity"².

¹ See <http://www.buzludja.com>, http://nikolamihov.com/forget_your_past.html and <http://dprbcn.wordpress.com/2010/03/22/communist-political-monuments-in-bulgaria/> (accessed 30.10.2010).

² Blagovest VĂLKOV, "The Stones of Memory", a statement to "The communist monuments", *ABITARE*, vol. 492, no. 3, 2009 (Source: web-project DPR-BARCELONA).

*Gazimestan:**Ex-Communist Medieval Memory under Surveillance*

In Serbia the official national holiday on June 28th celebrating the day of St Vitus is a date of high significance since the "notorious" *Kosovo Battle* is commemorated¹. The Battle was fought in 1389 between the army led by Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović and the invading – for more than a decade – Ottoman army, under the leadership of Sultan Murad I. Both Lazar and Murad lost their lives during the battle, the bulk of both armies were wiped out, and those remaining withdrew from Kosovo. The battle ended in a draw.

Seventy years before the actual defeat of the medieval Serbian state by the Ottoman powers, it was a time when no nations, in modern terms, existed, only moderately Christian local lords linked to their land and the emperor, while land and power were fragmented. Yet, the earliest traces of a Kosovo legend appeared in late 14th century's chronicles and correspondence with the West, in which a "Christian triumph" was quite openly claimed. A myth was to be further enforced relying on speculations, propagandizing heroism and treachery – linked to hereditary claims, or acquiring local colors. Additionally, under the tutelage and close supervision of the Church – since it was the only institution that survived the Ottoman conquest – by the late 16th century, and early 17th century, it had already taken a specific Serbian shape, whilst gradually 18th century's texts and paintings managed to narrate it in a *proto-nationalist* form.

Eventually, it was the 19th century's writers, mainly Vuk Karadžić (1787-1864), who transformed the Kosovo myth into a gripping national ideology. Even though sources are indefinite² and not even one speaks explicitly about a "Turkish victory", a defeat at the hands of the Turkish army was used to represent the subordinate Serbian nation as one of *hero-martyrs* rebelling against the Turkish oppressors, inspiring ideals of self-sacrifice – not even Montenegro failed to incorporate Kosovo in its national ideology³. Ever since, emerging Christian/national characteristics were defined in sharp contrast to the ones of the Ottoman Turks. Among them, the emphasis on Lazar's canonization in 1390 and his cult were also used to secure the coherence of the Serb flock. Similar ventures created a deep belief in religious symbols and practices, which survived until the 19th century's national states formation. However, the conditions under which nations sought to be created were not unrelated to the inherent need for geographical expansion, relying on the assistance of Western, fellow-Christian powers. Ergo, the Balkans, sarcastically called "*Balkanie*" by the well-known French geographer Élisée Reclus (1830-1905), were described as an area in which a remarkable system of consecutive foreign sovereignties was exercised "*en cascades*"⁴.

¹ Milorad EKMEČIĆ, "The Emergence of St Vitus Day as the Principal National Holiday of the Serbs", in Wayne VUCINICH, Thomas EMMERT (eds.), *Kosovo Legacy of a Medieval Battle*, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, 1991, pp. 331-342.

² On the 550th anniversary of the Battle: Mihailo DINIĆ, "Istorija jos nije uspela da razluci istorisko Kosovo od legendarnog" ("History Still Can Not Distinguish Historical from Legendary Kosovo"), *Politika*, 28/06/1939, p. 3.

³ Petar II PETROVIĆ-NJEGOŠ (1813-1851), *Горски вѣѣнац* (Mountain Wreath), Armenian Mechitarist monastery, Vienna, 1847. Njegoš transformed the legacy of Kosovo's martyrdom into a compelling force, determined to eliminate foreign dominion from all South Slav lands.

⁴ Élisée RECLUS, *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*, 2 vols, Hachette, Paris, 1876-1894; IDEM, *L'Homme et la Terre*, vol. 1, F. Maspero, Paris, 1982 [1905-1908], pp. 93, 161.

It was in such processes that, during the 20th century, the myth of Kosovo was embedded in *collective memory*, remaining important in the Serbian-Albanian conflict over Kosovo and Metohija. To enhance its significance, the Serbian Patriarchate represented Kosovo as the cradle of the Serbian state, a "sacred land", and "Golgotha"¹ – becoming the driving force of the secular outlook of religious identification. Formulated to create a generative process, it led to the connection of all important events to the very date of the battle, cementing its memory with a timeless, emblematic significance. Not accidentally, on the same day in 1914, the Serb student Gavrilo Princip assassinated the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand on a bridge in Sarajevo, an event that dragged the region into the *Great War*. Seven years later, in 1921, Yugoslavia got its first modern constitution ratified by establishing the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. Even the exclusion of the Yugoslav Party from Cominform – the final split between Yugoslavia and Soviet Union –, was publicly announced on the same date in 1948, obviously marking the independence of the Federation², remarkably embedded in the aforementioned context.

This myth-formatting process is mostly known in its Serbian/Christian variant, but the area of Gazimestan proves that similar processes also occurred in the Muslim side. Etymologically, Gazimestan derives from *gazi*, meaning "hero" in Turkish, and, in Arabic "warrior", and *mesto*, meaning "place" in Serbian. Thus, this place-name, not an unusual mixture for the Balkan demographic and linguistic realities, also conveys in Turkish/Arabic the local sealing of the second protagonist of the fight in a "land of Hero-Warriors". Two memorial loci are of high significance for the Muslims: The *Bayraktar Türbe*, a mausoleum built at the center of the field, in honor of Sultan Murad's standard-bearer (*bayraktar*), killed during the 1389 battle. The tomb is an important sanctuary for the followers of the Sadiye Derviş Order, to which Murad's standard-bearer is believed to have belonged³. The second is *Meşhed-i Hüddâvendigâr*, a mausoleum erected in honor of the martyr sultan Murad, where his intestines are buried⁴, on the spot where it is believed that his tent was located and he was allegedly killed during the Kosovo Battle. For generations the duty to guard it, passed from father to son within the *Türbedari* (guardians of the tomb) family, who resides right next to it. In the wider area, tombstones of former Muslim governors of Skopje are

¹ See Ivo BANAC, *The National Question in Yugoslavia Origins, History, Politics*, Cornell University, Ithaca London, 1984; Olga ZIROJEVIĆ, "Kosovo in the Collective Memory", in Nebojša POPOV (ed.), *The Road to War in Serbia Trauma and Catharsis*, CEU, Budapest, New York, 2000 [1996], pp. 189-211; Radmila RADIĆ, "L'Église serbe et la «question serbe»" in N. POPOV (dir.), *Radiographie d'un nationalisme. Les racines serbes du conflit yougoslave*, Editions de l'Atelier, Paris, 1998 [1996]; Ivan DJURIC, *Glossaire de l'espace yougoslave*, Esprit des Péninsules, Paris, 1999, pp. 85-92; Ivan ČOLOVIĆ, *The Politics of Symbols in Serbia: Essays in Political Anthropology*, Hurst & Co., London, 2002 [2000]. On the Serbian Church's discourse, see: Archimandrite Athanase JEVTIĆ, *Dossier Kosovo, L'Âge d'Homme*, Paris, 1991; A. JEVTIĆ, *Stradanja Srba na Kosovu i Metohiji od 1941 do 1990* ("The Suffering of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija from 1941 to 1990"), Jesinstvo, Priština, 1990. An exhibition was also organised jointly by the Serbian and the Church of Greece titled *Kóσσoβo Iερά γη*, in Athens (2006).

² A decision contrasting Bulgaria's denouncement of the Bled accord in the same year.

³ A white round-shaped building with turquoise cupola, which is *being* looked after by a small group of Sadiye Derviş followers in Priština, after being heavily damaged during the late 1990's conflicts.

⁴ Murad's actual remains were sent to his imperial mausoleum in Bursa, the first capital of the Ottoman Empire.

also visible (Rifat Paša, Hafiz Paša). The mausoleum is said to have been reconstructed by Hursid Paša, the famous repressor of Karadorde Petrović's revolt, associated with one of the most dramatic moments of the Serbian uprisings, the elevation of the *Skull Tower* in Niš, Serbia¹.

Thus, Gazimestan is the meeting place of two religious powers, officially in conflict for centuries. In Tito's Yugoslavia (1953) the rivalry was reinstated in a modern, patriotic context, when a Memorial Tower of equally enormous dimensions like the one at Buzludža was erected, paying tribute to Lazar and his army. The Memorial Tower of the Kosovo Battle designed by the Serbian architect – professor at the University of Belgrade, member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts –, Al. Deroko (1894-1988) represents a medieval tower in a shape simulating the Crusaders' towers in Mistra², Greece. The tower is about twenty five meters high, and stands on an elevated platform, surrounded by four concrete chimneys and benches, together with about twenty five acres of the surrounding land. More than 100 steps lead up to the viewing platform on Tower's top, from where Kosovo Plain is visible.

Near the Tower, a marble column bears chiseled a 15th century lyrical epitaph chant to Lazar written by his son, Despot Stefan Lazarević. Despite its Christian verbalism, the text reminds of the epitaph of Simonides of Ceos for the dead Spartans in the Battle of Thermopylae, in a synthesis that reveals an attempt to highlight the significance of the battle of Kosovo: the glory of unity of small powers. In its sixty seven lines, the column explains to visitors that "in stone nature, I am placed among the bones of the dead, upright in the middle of the field, representing the cross and the flag" to remind to every "stranger or hailing from this soil", upon "entering the Serbian land of Kosovo" of Lazar, a "Serbian ruler, an unwavering pillar of piety", who "loved everything that Christ wanted" and "accepted the sacrificial wreath of struggle and heavenly glory". He "was saved by God, after bravely suffering in Hagarene hands, becoming a *martyr* of Christ"³.

On the Tower's façade visitors also read "Косовска/Кнежева клетва" ("Kosovo's/Prince's Curse") with which, according to the legend, Lazar cursed before the Battle those Serbs "of birth, blood and heritage", who ignored his call for a united, defensive war against the Ottomans. Noteworthy is that its motives are only updating the medieval Christian worldview in a socialist environment, highlighting the impact of the religious poetry that first appeared in the 1845 edition of V. Karadžić's collection of Serbian folk songs; the notable lack of reference to the Serb blood and heritage in the 1813 edition indicates a posterior rise of Serbian nationalism. In that context, the curse reminds and/or is reminded by the Serbian *ocila* (firesteels), a term associated with Serbian coat of arms, where four firesteels are displayed around a central cross. Deliberately simulating Byzantine firesteel acronym from Palaeologan era (last Byzantine dynasty before Ottoman conquest)⁴, it refers to a popular slogan among

¹ A tower created by Ottomans after the Čegar hill Battle, in 1809. Built on the sides of a cubical structure, the mounted skulls of the dead rebels (including Karadorde's) served as a warning against rebellions.

² A strategically important location, six kilometers northwest of Sparta in Peloponnesos. After the middle of the 13th century it gradually became the political and spiritual center of the (semi)autonomous Despotate of Morea.

³ Quotations are parts of the inscription, translated from Serbian by the author. The only copy of the initial text from the column that Stefan is said to have placed in the same spot is preserved in the Serbian Patriarchal Library (no. 167).

Serbs, which is frequently used in times of national crisis. The phrase "Only Unity Saves Serbs" in Serbian, is displayed on a cross, forming an acronym of four C-shaped firesteels. Its message can be connected to the similar, afore-commented Bulgarian one¹. Sometimes it also reads "Saint Sava Serbian Patron" in Serbian, referring to the founder of the Serbian Church (1217), son of Stefan Nemanja, who laid the basis of a unified medieval state. Using *ocila* as symbol, the contemporary Serbian nationalist movement, named "1389", perpetuates the political nuances of the overloaded historical date.

These symbolic memories and emotional overloads were re-activated on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the battle, in 1989, when Slobodan Milošević chose Gazimestan Tower to deliver a fiery speech to the masses. Then, instead of the *ocila*, the years 1389 and 1989 were inscribed within the cross. In some cases the message was better illustrated. In between the years 1389 and 1989, a picture of the Tower, and the phrase "six centuries from the Kosovo Battle" in Serbian, were added. Both *representations* connected the memory of the Battle of Kosovo with Milošević's own policy, namely the reduction of the autonomy-status of the Kosovo province and the rights of the mostly Muslim Albanian population, established by the 1974 Yugoslavian Constitution. In his speech, among others, Milošević pointed out:

"What has been certain throughout all centuries until our time is that disharmony struck Kosovo 600 years ago. If we lost the battle, then this was not only the result of social superiority and the armed advantage of the Ottoman Empire, but also of the tragic disunity in the leadership of the Serbian state at that time [...] six centuries later, now, we are being again engaged in battles [...] They are not armed battles, although such things cannot be excluded yet [...] Our chief-battle now concerns implementing the economic, political, cultural, and general social prosperity, finding a quicker and more successful approach to a civilization in which people will live in the 21st century. For this battle, we certainly need heroism, of course of a somewhat different kind, but that courage, without which nothing serious and great can be achieved, remains unchanged and urgently necessary"¹.

As a response, Albanian nationalism led to tensions with Serbs, enhancing separatist tendencies in the region that led to the Wars of the late-1990's, causing NATO to intervene in order to stop what was identified by the Alliance, the EU and Western media² as an on-going campaign of ethnic cleansing. The idea of a lost ancestral, Greater land and the consequent practices to claim it challenged the Socialist Federal Republic model of governance and succeeded³ – mainly due to the fear and skepticism about a domino development that could have destabilized Europe, especially after the demise of Eastern Germany. Actually, it was the uncertainty of global imbalances and "containment" strategies that resulted in fragmentation and consequent formation of disputed areas needing guidance. Hence, since 2007 it offers the excuse for the

¹ Four Stylized Greek B's for the imperial motto *King of Kings Ruling over Kings*, in Greek.

² See the relative analysis on the aforementioned Bulgarian lev inscription.

³ Nebojša POPOV, "Srpski populizam; Od marginalne do dominantne pojave" ("Serbian Populism; from Marginal to Dominant Phenomenon"), *Vreme*, 24/05/1993. Milošević's speech can be consulted online at: <http://www.slobodan-milosevic.org/spch-kosovo1989.htm> (accessed 30.10.2011).

Tower's guardianship by KFOR troops alongside Kosovo Protection Corps (former UÇK, Kosovo Liberation Army)¹ granting to it political legitimacy. Visitors, mostly Serbians, need to show to the guards their ID cards upon entering. The oppressive ambience around the monument, disregarding notions of cultural protection², was completed with a surrounding fence accompanied by tanks. In 2010 a North Atlantic Council's decision replaced the *military necessity* of KFOR with that of Kosovo Police Service. In Kosovo's supervised independent area, the Tower is still monitored as a place of potential conflicts, exposed to endless political usages: later in 2010, the newly restored Murad's mausoleum was inaugurated by the Turkish prime-minister R. T. Erdoğan, obviously in the frames of the neo-Ottoman political doctrine. After highlighting it as the first symbol of Islam, "a seed of peace, brotherhood and unity that took root in Gazimestan's soil 711 years ago, later reaching Vienna", he didn't fail to promise diplomatic and economic assistance³.

CONCLUSION

The aforementioned *aesthetic dimensions*⁴ of the Buzludža and Gazimestan monuments clarify the symbolism of the prevailing discourses, as instruments used to satisfy current and past aspirations of supremacy. After World War II they were identified as a nationalist verbosity covering the socialist vacuum. In the Bulgarian case, they resulted in a disdain for any positive aspects of socialism and, consequently the memory of everything this regime constructed. Reversion rather than disdain is visible in Kosovo. Here, Western *paternalism*, in a neo-colonial model of governance, legalized through "international community's" military guard the transformation of the Serbian/Yugoslav collective memory into a Kosovar one and protected it from ethnically determined enemies.

In the post-Cold War era, democratization was introduced with domestic costs of rule adoption⁵. In Bulgaria it resulted in the permanence of influential and opportunistic political groups, remnants of the former system, which preyed on the actual institution of the state, perpetuating socio-economic disparities⁶. Similarly, in ex-Yugoslav countries, following the failure of the post-1989 political project to solve economic problems and to call for homogeneous nation-building, the people

¹ Noam CHOMSKY, Edward HERMAN, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Pantheon, New York, 1988.

² Julie MERTUS, *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths started a War*, California University Press, California, 1999; Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania (ed.), *The Truth on Kosova*, Encyclopedia Publishing House, Tirana, 1993; Paulin KOLA, *In Search of Greater Albania*, Hurst & Co, London, 2003, pp. 181-182.

³ In 1999 KLA had set explosive charges and badly damaged the Tower.

⁴ Gretel ADORNO, R. TIEDEMANN (eds), *Adorno Aesthetic Theory*, Routledge, London, 1984 [1966]; Herbert MARCUSE, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward A Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, Beacon, Boston, 1979.

⁵ Frank SCHIMMELFENNIG, Ulrich SEDELMEIER, "Governance by Conditionality: EU Rule Transfer to the Candidate Countries of Central and Eastern Europe", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 11, no. 4, August 2004, pp. 669-687.

⁶ Veselin GANEV, *Preying on the State: The transformation of Bulgaria after 1989*, Cornell University Press, New York, 2007.

of the Federation began confronting each other in relation to their respective ethnic/religious prerogatives.

To sum up, the current state of the two monuments provides an insight into a new demagoguery. Imposing close spatial and temporal control on places *pre*-selected to be "*re-constructed*" into bearers of *collective will*, it negotiates nowadays a socio-ideological consensus, along with the political one. The means used to this direction is the ideation of a false *collective being*, which finds its locus in an equally "*re-constructed*" memory. Since the only messages mediated are those by groups in power, social processes are related to specific distributions of power and influence. Thus the complex historical realities become oblivious, while the new memory oversimplifies and disorientates from the former social *cadres*. Lately, these processes are described as modern progressive tendencies regarding the past, influenced by similar European ones. Taking into consideration our paradigms, they seem more as politically correct attitudes regarding collective memory, socio-ideological *modernities* that only orbit around the core of European socio-political transformations¹.

¹ See f.i. Marshall BERMAN, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1982, pp 13-36, 87-130, 142-147, *passim*; John HARRISS, "The Second 'Great Transformation'? Capitalism at the end of the Twentieth Century", in Tim ALLEN, Allan THOMAS (eds), *Poverty and Development into the 21st Century*, Open University and Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2000, pp. 325-342; Raffaele SIMONE, *Le monstre doux: L'occident vire-t-il à droite?*, Gallimard, Paris, 2010.